

## 5.0 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENTS

During early review of SPPC's application, the BLM determined that Resource Management Plan (RMP) amendments would be required in conjunction with approval of a right-of-way grant for the Falcon to Gonder project. Proposals for new uses of federal public lands are evaluated for consistency with the goals, objectives, management actions, and land use designations contained in the relevant RMP(s).

Since portions of the Falcon to Gonder transmission line would extend outside of designated utility corridors<sup>1</sup> and cross a designated low visibility corridor along Interstate-80 (see [Figure 5-1](#)), the BLM determined that amendments to relevant RMPs would be required as part of the proposed action. BLM has also decided to amend the Shoshone-Eureka RMP at the same time to delete an existing planning corridor along Highway 305, based on recently obtained information about sensitive resources and wetlands along the corridor.

The following section describes the proposed RMP amendments, followed by an analysis of the environmental impacts and planning implications associated with adoption of these amendments.

### 5.1 PROPOSED RMP AMENDMENTS

The Falcon to Gonder route alternatives extend into three different BLM resource areas (i.e., Shoshone-Eureka, Elko and Egan), each with its own RMP and responsible field office. The following describes the amendments that would be required for the various route alternatives:

- Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan Amendment.** The BLM's Battle Mountain Field Office would designate a new 3-mile wide utility corridor centered along the Falcon to Gonder transmission line and delete an existing planning corridor near Highway 305 (see [Figure 5-1](#)). (This RMP amendment would be required for any of the Falcon to Gonder route alternatives.)
- Elko Resource Management Plan Amendment.** The BLM's Elko Field Office would designate a new 3-mile wide utility corridor centered along the Falcon to Gonder transmission line and modify a previous decision and allow the transmission line and utility corridor to overlap the existing "low visibility" corridor along the Interstate 80 (I-80) (see [Figure 5-1](#)). (This RMP amendment would be required for any of the Falcon to Gonder route alternatives.)
- Egan Resource Management Plan Amendment.** The BLM's Ely Field Office would designate a new 3-mile wide utility corridor centered along the Falcon to Gonder transmission line. (This RMP amendment would be required only for the Buck Mountain route alternative. If the preferred alternative – the Pine Valley (a) route – is approved, BLM would not need to amend the Egan Resource Management Plan.)

### 5.2 RMP AMENDMENT PROCESS

Resource Management Plans (RMPs) are policy and planning documents that are developed with public input and adopted by the BLM to guide the agency in managing resources and a variety of uses on public lands. Amendments of these plans are subject to public review and procedures outlined in federal regulations (43 CFR 1610.2-4). Pursuant to these regulations, BLM conducted outreach activities to

<sup>1</sup> As shown in Figure 5-1, only Segments I and J are within currently designated BLM utility corridors.

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obtain public input on the project and proposed amendments, developed and circulated planning criteria for use in evaluating the amendments, and incorporated an analysis of the RMP amendments into this EIS. The RMP amendment procedures also called for an extended 90-day public review period of the Draft EIS and RMP Amendments, which was provided. The regulations also call for a special Governor's Consistency Review of the Final EIS and RMP Amendments document.

### **5.2.1 PLANNING CRITERIA**

The following planning criteria were developed by the BLM for evaluation of the proposed RMP amendments. These criteria were published in the Federal Register on September 1, 2000, and circulated to the public for a 30-day review period, per the regulations. The plan amendments should be evaluated against the following criteria:

- Emphasize a balanced multiple-use approach to land management, protecting fragile and unique resources, yet not overly restricting the ability of other resources to provide economic goods and services.
- Ensure a system for transmission of utilities through the Resource Management Planning Areas that would allow for future expansion by multiple users.
- Minimize adverse impacts to the environment by concentrating compatible rights-of-way in designated corridors that avoid sensitive resource values.
- Select the preferred alternative based on a combination which best meets demands for public lands while minimizing disruption of the human environment.

### **5.3 OBJECTIVES FOR DESIGNATING UTILITY CORRIDORS**

In general, the BLM designates utility and planning corridors with the objectives of providing space for infrastructure projects, while minimizing the proliferation of dispersed rights-of-way across public lands and the associated environmental impacts. Designation of utility and planning corridors in an RMP indicates the BLM's preferred location for linear rights-of-way (such as those needed for transmission lines, pipelines and other infrastructure projects) in a particular resource area. The utility and planning corridors designated in the Shoshone-Eureka, Elko, and Egan RMPs (BLM 1983, 1986, 1987, respectively) were designated in the 1980s based on the best information available at the time.

These corridor alignments were based largely on input from utilities and government agencies (e.g., the Western Utility Group Regional Corridor Committee) about expected needs for future facilities and their desired locations (BLM 1983). However, some of these projects were never built due to changes in the economy or a variety of other reasons. Other projects were approved outside of designated corridors (e.g., transmission lines for specific mining operations). Thus, while BLM utility corridors reflect the agency's best efforts to predict future needs, they do occasionally need to be re-evaluated and updated.

Designation of a utility corridor does not mean that future rights-of-way are restricted to corridors, nor is it a commitment by the BLM to approve all right-of-way applications within corridors. If the Falcon to Gonder project and RMP amendments are approved, subsequent projects seeking to locate in the utility corridor would be required to undergo additional environmental review pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. The average number of transmission lines that are placed together in the same corridor is usually two to four lines (personal communication with John Berdrow, SPPC, July 31, 2000). However, the corridor could contain other linear facilities, such as pipelines, fiber-optic cables, etc.

**FIGURE 5-1: EXISTING BLM CORRIDORS**

While the amendments propose designating a 3-mile wide utility corridor centered on the Falcon to Gonder transmission line, the width of the corridor may be narrowed or widened in places at the BLM's discretion in the future. This may be necessary and appropriate, for example, as a way to avoid disturbing sensitive resources in a particular area. The 3-mile width is considered a general guideline. This flexibility is desirable as it allows the BLM to locate future rights-of-way and facilities so as to avoid sensitive resources, developments, mines, etc. Each new facility proposed for the corridor would be subject to NEPA environmental review and consideration of potential impacts to such sensitive resources, land uses, etc. The ultimate capacity of the corridor for additional facilities would be determined by BLM through review of future NEPA documents, as well as ongoing land use monitoring and management activities.

## **5.4 ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND PLANNING IMPLICATIONS**

This section presents an analysis of the environmental impacts and planning implications that would be associated with approval of the Resource Management Plan amendments, as described above. Pursuant to federal regulations, this analysis is limited to the portions of the RMPs being considered for amendment.

### **5.4.1 GEOLOGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP AMENDMENT**

The Falcon to Gonder project would not substantially conflict with RMP management objectives for locatable (hard rock) and mineral resources, and leasable geothermal resources, oil and gas, and sodium, potassium or other resources. Coordination with mining companies when locating future rights-of-way can help avoid potential conflicts with large scale mining operations. It is also possible, although expensive, to relocate existing utility lines to accommodate future mining operations.

#### **ELKO RMP AMENDMENT**

The implications of the Elko RMP amendment on geology and mineral resources would be largely similar to those associated with the Shoshone-Eureka RMP amendment noted above.

#### **EGAN RMP AMENDMENT**

The implications of the Egan RMP amendment on geology and mineral resources would be largely similar to those associated with the Shoshone-Eureka RMP amendment noted above.

### **5.4.2 SOILS**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP AMENDMENT**

The Falcon to Gonder project would not conflict with RMP watershed management objectives to reduce and prevent erosion and maintain or improve water quality in the resource area. No conflicts to the RMP are anticipated as long as any future projects in the same corridor comply with the existing watershed management objectives.

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## **ELKO RMP AMENDMENT**

The Falcon to Gonder project would not conflict with RMP soil management objectives to maintain or improve rangeland productivity and minimize present and potential erosion due to wind or water. No conflicts to the RMP are anticipated as long as any future projects in the same corridor comply with the existing watershed management objectives.

## **EGAN RMP AMENDMENT**

The Falcon to Gonder project would not conflict with RMP soil management objectives to protect, maintain or improve the quality of the soil resource. No conflicts to the RMP are anticipated as long as any future projects in the same corridor comply with the existing watershed management objectives.

### **5.4.3 WATER RESOURCES**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP AMENDMENT**

The Falcon to Gonder project would not conflict with RMP watershed and water resources management objectives to protect the surface waters and ground water supplies and their quality. No conflicts to the RMP are anticipated providing that future projects in the same corridor comply with the existing watershed management objectives and implement mitigation measures to protect the water resources.

#### **ELKO RMP AMENDMENT**

The Falcon to Gonder project would not conflict with RMP watershed and water resources management objectives to protect the surface waters and ground water supplies and their quality. No conflicts to the RMP are anticipated providing that future projects in the same corridor comply with the existing watershed management objectives and implement mitigation measures to protect the water resources.

#### **EGAN RMP AMENDMENT**

The Falcon to Gonder project would not conflict with RMP watershed and water resources management objectives to protect the surface waters and ground water supplies and their quality. No conflicts to the RMP are anticipated providing that future projects in the same corridor comply with the existing watershed management objectives and implement mitigation measures to protect the water resources.

### **5.4.4 VEGETATION**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP AMENDMENT**

RMP management objectives pertaining to vegetation include minimization of vegetation clearing, replacement of vegetation in disturbed areas, protection and improvement of wetland and riparian habitat, and deferment of grazing on vegetation manipulation projects to allow for reestablishment of vegetation. Management objectives related to pinyon-juniper woodlands include sustained-yield production of woodland products including pine nut collection and cut wood products, while protecting sensitive values (e.g., scenic, recreational, watershed, and other values) and historical uses. Standard operating procedures include the following measures regarding vegetation:

- Cutting and removing woodland will be conducted on a sustained basis to allow for continued production except where the objective is to clear a woodland area for increased benefit to other resource values,
- Herbicides to reduce sagebrush and other plant species will be in accordance with BLM procedures to protect non-target species, and
- Vegetation manipulation in riparian areas will not be allowed if it will alter the natural plant composition.

The Falcon to Gonder project would not conflict with RMP vegetation management objectives and standard operating procedures. The RMP amendment would not result in significant impacts to vegetation resources. The RMP objectives for pinyon-juniper woodland allow for flexibility in management, including commercial and non-commercial harvesting and clearing. As a result, the RMP amendment may result in impacts related to pinyon-juniper woodlands. Impacts related to the Falcon to Gonder transmission line project are discussed in Section 3.4, Vegetation. Use of the same corridor for additional utilities may result in additional impacts to pinyon-juniper woodland related to those potential projects. Mitigation measures for losses of pinyon-juniper woodland, if required, would need to be developed in coordination with the BLM, consistent with the provisions of the RMP and other plans pertinent to the woodlands (i.e., the BAER Plan [BLM 1999a]).

## **ELKO RMP AMENDMENT**

The Elko RMP management objectives, including those for woodland areas, are similar to those of the Shoshone-Eureka RMP. The Falcon to Gonder project and RMP amendment would not conflict with the RMP vegetation management objectives and would not result in significant impacts, with the possible exception of impacts to pinyon-juniper woodlands, as discussed under the Shoshone-Eureka RMP amendment analysis.

## **EGAN RMP AMENDMENT**

The Egan RMP management objectives, including those for woodland areas, are similar to those of the Shoshone-Eureka RMP. The Falcon to Gonder project and RMP amendment would not conflict with the RMP vegetation management objectives and would not result in significant impacts, with the possible exception of impacts to pinyon-juniper woodlands, as discussed under the Shoshone-Eureka RMP amendment analysis.

### **5.4.5 INVASIVE NONNATIVE SPECIES**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP AMENDMENT**

The Falcon to Gonder project and RMP amendment would not conflict with the RMP management objectives and would not result in significant, unmitigated impacts. Future projects in the corridor could result in noxious weed and cheatgrass-related impacts; however, such impacts would have to be addressed and mitigated under NEPA.

The RMP generally does not discuss noxious weed management directly. Noxious weeds may be indirectly considered through vegetation, range, and wildlife management objectives pertaining to enhancement of degraded range and wildlife habitat or other types of environmental degradation. Standard operating procedures pertaining to herbicidal or other types of treatment of vegetation may also apply to treatment of noxious weeds.

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## **ELKO RMP AMENDMENT**

The Falcon to Gonder project and RMP amendment would not conflict with the RMP management objectives and would not result in significant impacts. The analysis is the same as that discussed under the Shoshone-Eureka RMP amendment, above.

## **EGAN RMP AMENDMENT**

The Falcon to Gonder project and RMP amendment would not conflict with the RMP management objectives and would not result in significant impacts. The analysis is the same as that discussed under the Shoshone-Eureka RMP amendment, above.

## **5.4.6 WILDLIFE AND WILDLIFE HABITAT**

### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP AMENDMENT**

One of BLM's objectives for designating utility corridors is to minimize adverse impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat. The new utility corridor paralleling the Falcon to Gonder transmission line would be shorter and thus impact fewer miles of wildlife habitat than the current Highway 305 planning corridor. Wildlife resources vary from one area to another; however, without accurate baseline data to compare potential impacts from the existing planning corridor to the proposed utility corridor, the comparative impacts are rather conjectural. The Highway 305 corridor crosses through the northern end of the Toiyabe Range, north of the town of Austin. This portion of the corridor is the most critical for wildlife and wildlife habitat given the higher elevation and greater habitat diversity.

When the Highway 305 planning corridor was delineated in the mid-1980s, little environmental data had been collected. Since then, sensitive wildlife resources, including a wetland area, have been identified along that planning corridor. This new information has prompted the BLM to amend the Shoshone-Eureka RMP to delete the Highway 305 planning corridor. (This is discussed further in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1).

Wildlife and wildlife habitat impacts from the new utility corridor designation along the Falcon to Gonder transmission line would be similar to those discussed under Cumulative Effects (Section 4.6). While some habitat fragmentation would occur from locating utility lines together, the impact may be offset by the benefits of minimizing proliferation of utility lines in other areas. Future rights-of-way applicants would be required to analyze the potential impacts under NEPA. In some areas, the utility corridor width could be adjusted to protect seasonal habitats or other sensitive resources.

## **ELKO RMP AMENDMENT**

Designation of a new utility corridor in the Elko RMP planning area would have similar implications as those stated under the Shoshone-Eureka RMP (see above).

## **EGAN RMP AMENDMENT**

Designation of a new utility corridor in the Egan RMP planning area would have similar impacts to those stated under the Shoshone-Eureka RMP (see above).

### **5.4.7 SPECIAL-STATUS SPECIES**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP AMENDMENT**

Overall, impacts to special-status wildlife species as a result of the RMP amendment would be similar to those impacts discussed above for Wildlife and Wildlife Habitats. However, similar impacts can have greater effects on special-status species since their distribution and abundance can be limited and their habitats are often rarer. Sensitive species such as sage grouse, ferruginous hawk and others are known to occur along the Highway 305 planning corridor, as well as in the Falcon to Gonder study area.

In terms of habitat fragmentation of special-status species, it is preferable to locate new utilities in areas that are already disturbed (e.g., with existing utilities, roadways, etc.), as opposed to pristine areas. The Crescent Valley route alternatives have the most existing disturbance in terms of existing transmission lines, mining operations; however, these two route alternatives also have the most impacts to special-status species (see Section 3.20). Buck Mountain is the most undisturbed and relatively pristine of the study corridors. Pine Valley is somewhere in the middle in terms of existing disturbance. However, the Pine Valley (a) route alternative for the Falcon to Gonder transmission line would have the fewest impacts overall to special-status species and sensitive wildlife (as shown in Section 3.20).

#### **ELKO RMP AMENDMENT**

Designation of a new utility corridor would have similar impacts to those stated under the Shoshone-Eureka RMP (see above). The location of a utility corridor within Segment E would be inconsistent with Elko RMP's management objective of restricting construction activities that would cross or interfere with crucial sage grouse or raptor wintering or nesting areas; however, mitigation measures are available to reduce this impact to less-than-significant.

#### **EGAN RMP AMENDMENT**

Designation of a new utility corridor would have similar impacts to those stated under the Shoshone-Eureka RMP and the Elko RMP (see above). However, the location of a utility corridor within Segment E would likely have a greater impact on seasonal mule deer habitat. It would also likely have a greater impact on pronghorn antelope than the other proposed routes.

### **5.4.8 RANGE RESOURCES**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP AMENDMENT**

The RMP indicates that grazing allotment management should be multiple-use in nature, developed in consultation with interested parties and coordinated with other resource activity plans. Management objectives for range resources are to maintain current satisfactory conditions, improve current unsatisfactory conditions, or manage the allotments custodially while protection existing resources. The proposed plan amendment would not significantly affect range resources because a utility corridor will not effectively alter the use of the landscape to exclude cattle, sheep, or horses both wild and domestic. The Falcon to Gonder transmission line, for example, is expected to result in the loss of less than 20 AUMs. Thus, the plan amendment is not expected to significantly affect range resources. No conflicts with the RMP's range resource management goals are anticipated.



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## **ELKO RMP AMENDMENT**

The effects of the plan amendment for the Elko RMP on range resource management goals would be similar to those discussed above.

## **EGAN RMP AMENDMENT**

The effects of the plan amendment for the Egan RMP on range resource management goals would be similar to those discussed above.

## **5.4.9 VISUAL RESOURCES**

### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP AMENDMENT**

Designation of the new utility corridor would be inconsistent with some of the visual resource management class objectives currently identified in this RMP (i.e., Roberts Mountains [Class III], Garden Pass [Class III], Devil's Gate and Anchor Peak [Class II]). As with the Falcon to Gonder project, future projects permitted within the new utility corridor would likely traverse the same established Visual Resource Management (VRM) classes where the integrity of the landscape is important. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that future above-ground projects in the corridor would have the same types of adverse visual impacts as the Falcon to Gonder project.

These could include visual contrasts exceeding the established VRM class objectives. The mitigation measures such as those proposed to eliminate or reduce visual contrast of the Falcon to Gonder project for Segments B, D, F, G, H, and I listed in Section 3.9 could also be required of future projects to reduce or eliminate impacts associated with the RMP amendment.

### **ELKO RMP AMENDMENT**

Designation of the new utility corridor would be inconsistent with some of the visual resource management objectives currently identified in this RMP (i.e., Cortez Mountain [Class III], Cortez Canyon/Cortez Historic District [Class III], and crossing the "low visibility" corridor along I-80). The BLM designated this low visibility corridor along I-80 for the purpose of allowing utility transmission facilities to be located within the corridor if the facility is not evident in the characteristic landscape (BLM 1986). By approving the proposed amendment to the Elko RMP, the BLM would be allowing the utility corridor to be designated across I-80 and overlap the low visibility corridor. The visual impact analysis for the Falcon to Gonder transmission line determined that it would have a less-than-significant visual impact across the I-80 (i.e., the low visibility corridor). However, applicants for future projects in the corridor still would be required to analyze visual impacts pursuant to NEPA and to mitigate as appropriate.

As with the Falcon to Gonder project, future projects permitted within the new utility corridor would likely traverse the same established Visual Resource Management (VRM) classes. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that future above-ground projects in the corridor would have the same types of adverse visual impacts as the Falcon to Gonder project.

These could include visual contrasts exceeding the established VRM class objectives. Mitigation measures proposed to eliminate or reduce visual contrast of the Falcon to Gonder project for Segments A, C, D, and E in Section 3.9 also could be required of future projects to reduce or eliminate impacts associated with the RMP amendment.

## **EGAN RMP AMENDMENT**

Segment E of the Buck Mountain route alternative is the only segment that would fall outside of designated corridors within the Egan RMP resource area. Future projects in the utility corridor would traverse interim VRM classes established by the Egan BLM district and have similar impacts to visual resources as the Falcon to Gonder project (i.e., significant impacts to the Pony Express Trail and where the corridor passes through the Buck Mountains at Buck Pass). Therefore, similar mitigation measures as those proposed for Segment E in Section 3.9 could be required for future projects to reduce or eliminate visual impacts.

### **5.4.10 PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP AMENDMENT**

The proposed amendment would not create conflict with the Shoshone-Eureka RMP objectives related to general public health and safety issues. Best management practices and mitigation measures, such as the Fire Prevention and Suppression Plan outlined in Appendix F and Section 3.10, could be applied to future projects within the utility corridor. Thus, the amendment is not anticipated to create significant public health and safety impacts.

#### **ELKO RMP AMENDMENT**

The proposed amendment would not create policy conflicts with the Elko RMP related to general public health and safety issues. Best management practices and mitigation measures, such as the Fire Prevention and Suppression Plan outlined in Appendix F and Section 3.10, could be applied to future projects within the utility corridor. Thus, the amendment is not anticipated to create significant public health and safety impacts.

#### **EGAN RMP AMENDMENT**

The proposed amendment would not create policy conflicts with the Egan RMP related to general public health and safety issues. Specifically, the Egan RMP directs the development of a fire management plan that “emphasizes fire as a resource management tool and allows for limited suppression in some instances. It would be used to improve habitat and to increase available forage” (BLM 1984:6). Best management practices and mitigation measures, such as the Fire Prevention and Suppression Plan outlined in Appendix F and Section 3.10, could be applied to future projects within the utility corridor. Thus, the amendment is not anticipated to create significant public health and safety impacts.

### **5.4.11 NOISE**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP**

The Shoshone-Eureka RMP contains no management objectives related to noise. As a result, the RMP amendment would not conflict with the Shoshone-Eureka RMP. Future projects in the corridor that could result in noise-related impacts would be addressed and mitigated under NEPA.

#### **ELKO RMP**

The Elko RMP contains no management objectives related to noise. As a result, the RMP amendment would not conflict with the Shoshone-Eureka RMP. Future projects in the corridor that could result in noise-related impacts would be addressed and mitigated under NEPA.

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## **EGAN RMP**

The Egan RMP contains no management objectives related to noise. As a result, the RMP amendment would not conflict with the Shoshone-Eureka RMP. Future projects in the corridor that could result in noise-related impacts would be addressed and mitigated under NEPA.

### **5.4.12 AIR QUALITY**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP**

Although air quality goals are not specifically stated in the Shoshone-Eureka RMP, the proposed amendment is not anticipated to result in significant, unmitigated impacts to air quality. Future projects in the corridor that could cause air quality impacts would be subject to NEPA review and air quality impacts mitigated as appropriate.

#### **ELKO RMP**

The proposed amendment would not conflict with the Elko RMP management guidance that “air quality will be protected” . . . and prevented from “deterioration beyond the established standards specified in the Nevada Ambient Air Quality Standards” (BLM 1985). The RMP amendment would not result in significant, unmitigated impacts related to air quality. Future projects in the corridor could result in air quality related impacts; however, such impacts would have to be addressed and mitigated under NEPA.

## **EGAN RMP**

The proposed amendment would not conflict with the Egan RMP management guidance to “protect and maintain the high air quality in the area. Recommendations on projects made to protect the air quality are done on a case-by-case basis” (BLM 1984). The RMP amendment would not result in significant, unmitigated impacts to air quality. Future projects in the corridor could result in air quality related impacts; however, such impacts would have to be addressed and mitigated under NEPA.

### **5.4.13 RECREATION/WILDERNESS**

#### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP**

Very few developed recreational sites exist within 40 miles of the corridor and additional rights-of-way would have little or no effect on these sites. However, additional rights-of-way projects traversing the National Historic Pony Express Trail along Segment G would create additional adverse visual effects to this recreational resource, potentially reducing its recreational value.

Along Segment F, a portion of the 3-mile wide utility corridor may fall within the Roberts Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA), having a potentially adverse visual effect on this recreational resource if additional projects are located within the WSA. This impact could be avoided by locating future projects outside of the WSA or by reducing the width of the utility corridor in this area. For these reasons, the proposed Shoshone-Eureka RMP amendment is not expected to cause significant impacts on recreation resources.

## ELKO RMP

Similar to the Falcon to Gonder project, the new utility corridor designation near Segments A and C would have no discernable effect to recreational resources in the area due to large distances between established recreation areas and the corridor.

## EGAN RMP

If the proposed Egan RMP amendment is adopted, additional rights-of-way traversing the National Historic Emigrant Trail along Segment E could create additional adverse visual effects to this recreational resource. While access to the trail would remain unrestricted, the visual effects could reduce the recreational value of the trail for those recreating the historic Pony Express ride. Portions of the 3-mile wide utility corridor along Segment E may also fall within the alignment of the National Historic Emigrant Trail, having a potentially significant visual effect on this recreational resource. Future rights-of-way could be located closer to the Falcon to Gonder transmission line or on the opposite side of the line to avoid these impacts to the Emigrant Trail.

Portions of the utility corridor along Segment E may also fall within the Ruby Mountains Division of Humboldt National Forest, having a potentially significant visual effect on this recreational resource if a future right-of-way were constructed within the forest. However, future rights-of-way would likely be constructed closer to the Falcon to Gonder transmission line, or on the opposite side of the line, to avoid this recreational resource. As a result, an amendment to the Egan RMP would not likely have a significant adverse impact on recreation/wilderness.

### 5.4.14 LAND USE AND ACCESS

#### SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP

Segments B, F, G, and the southern half of Segment D would fall outside of the BLM designated utility corridors in this resource area. As such, the RMP would be amended to include a designated utility corridor along these segments. Additional easements would be required if future rights-of-way are permitted on private lands, potentially precluding or conflicting with existing or proposed land uses. Similar to the Falcon to Gonder project, private property owners would likely be compensated for lands traversed by future transmission/utility line projects during the easement acquisition process.

Given the sparsely developed nature of the project area, the corridor is not expected to substantially alter land use patterns in the region. The Cortez Mine and the town of Crescent Valley could be avoided by future rights-of-way in these areas. Subsequent environmental review would occur for potential future projects, identifying potential conflicts with developed land uses and mining operations. As a result, an amendment to the Shoshone-Eureka RMP would not have a significant adverse impact on developed areas or private property.

The Shoshone-Eureka RMP identifies a number of land tenure adjustments in the vicinity of Segment H. These adjustments identify public lands suitable for disposal north of the town of Eureka and in Township 22 North, Range 52 East, near Segment H. If amended, a designated utility corridor in this location may conflict with the RMP land use policy of public lands disposal. The objective of land tenure adjustments is to increase opportunities for economic development (for recreation, community expansion, agriculture, etc.) by moderately increasing the amount of privately owned land within the resources area consistent with other resource management objectives. Since all land use adjustments are discretionary and must be evaluated through the NEPA process and consistent with the other resource objectives (including the provision of utility corridors in the resource area), an amendment to the

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Shoshone-Eureka RMP would not conflict with the other policy objectives concerning land tenure adjustments.

## **ELKO RMP**

Similar to the Falcon to Gonder project, a new corridor along Segments A and C would traverse a number of privately owned parcels. However, given the sparsely developed nature of this area, future projects permitted within the designated utility corridor would not be expected to have a significant effect on public or private land uses nor would they be expected to substantially alter land use patterns in the region. The amendment to the Elko RMP is not expected to pose substantial impacts to land use.

## **EGAN RMP**

Although the area along Segment E is sparsely populated and primarily public land, there are large, privately owned farms in Newark Valley that would fall within the new 3-mile wide utility corridor. Future projects permitted along the Segment E corridor would undergo environmental review, potentially requiring future projects to locate closer to the Falcon to Gonder project in order to avoid these land uses. Similarly, future rights-of-way could be required to avoid mining operations located in this valley. Designation of a utility corridor in this area would not remove substantial amounts of land from grazing activities, as this land use is wide-spread throughout the region. For these reasons, the amendment to the Egan RMP is not anticipated have substantial impacts on land uses, such as privately owned farms, mines, or grazing.

## **5.4.15 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC VALUES**

### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP**

Since the new utility corridor would be located in a sparsely populated area with few economic activities except for dispersed ranching and mining, the social and economic effects of additional rights-of-way within the corridor would have little or no discernable effect. Rights-of-way and projects could be located strategically to avoid conflicts with such economic activities within the corridor. Similar to the Falcon to Gonder project, the proponent of any right-of-way permitted within the corridor would pay a right-of-way rental fee for public lands crossed by the project and compensate private land owners for easements across their land. The majority of privately owned land in the proposed corridor is in the northern portion along Segment A. Other socioeconomic impacts would be similar to the Falcon to Gonder project (i.e., not significant).

### **ELKO RMP**

Future rights-of-way within this area would have similar social and economic effects as the Falcon to Gonder project and as discussed above for the Shoshone-Eureka RMP (i.e., not significant).

### **EGAN RMP**

Future rights-of-way within this area would have similar social and economic effects as the Falcon to Gonder project and as discussed above for the Shoshone-Eureka RMP (i.e., not significant).

## 5.4.16 CULTURAL RESOURCES AND PALEONTOLOGY

### SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP

Numerous cultural resources have been identified within 500-foot study corridor for the Falcon to Gonder project. It is reasonable to assume that additional rights-of-way permitted within the utility corridor would have roughly the same types of adverse impacts on cultural resources as the Falcon to Gonder project, as additional cultural resources could exist anywhere within the 3-mile wide utility corridor.

These could include direct construction-related impacts, as well as indirect impacts such as increased access by construction personnel. Visual intrusions into sensitive cultural sites, including TCPs along Segment B and historic sites such as the Pony Express Trail along Segments G and H, could also be worsened with the addition of future linear projects within the designated utility corridor. Sites that would be avoided by the project could be impacted by future rights-of-way within the corridor, creating a pattern of ongoing disturbance to cultural resources, similar to that described in Chapter 4, Cumulative Impacts. The mitigation measures proposed in Chapter 4 (i.e., Cumulative Cultural Mitigation-1) could be applied to future projects in the utility corridor to eliminate or reduce cultural resource impacts.

Since few cultural surveys have been completed in the Highway 305 area, it is impossible to discern the amount of cultural resources that exist within this area. However, given the amount of cultural resources in the 500-foot study corridor, it is reasonable to assume that numerous cultural resources also exist in the Highway 305 area. Elimination of the Highway 305 planning corridor would help avoid impacts to cultural resources located there. However, the effects to cultural resources would be transferred to the preferred route, with an overall neutral effect.

In summary, the designation of a utility corridor along the preferred route alternative would have potentially significant impacts to cultural resources. Some of these impacts would be offset by the application of Cumulative Cultural Mitigation-1, and the elimination of the Highway 305 corridor. In addition, future projects would undergo subsequent environmental review to determine the extent of their impacts to cultural resources and identify appropriate mitigation measures.

### ELKO RMP

Impacts to cultural resources associated with the Elko RMP amendment are expected to be similar to those mentioned above for the Shoshone-Eureka RMP. As many cultural resources were identified in the Segment A and C region, it is reasonable to assume that other cultural resources would exist within a 3-mile wide corridor in this area. Additional rights-of-way in this corridor could create a pattern of on-going disturbance to cultural resources. As discussed above, application of Cumulative Cultural Mitigation-1 and subsequent environmental review of the impacts to cultural resources of these future projects would reduce the effects of amending the Elko RMP.

### EGAN RMP

Impacts to cultural resources associated with the Egan RMP amendment are expected to be similar to those mentioned above for the Shoshone-Eureka RMP. Numerous high-integrity and NRHP-eligible sites have been located within the Segment E corridor. It is reasonable to assume that additional resources would exist throughout this region. Additional rights-of-way in this corridor could create a pattern of on-going disturbance to cultural resources. Direct and indirect impacts to cultural resources would be similar to the project. Specifically, additional rights-of-way near Segment E would allow greater access to an area that is now relatively remote, increasing the potential for unauthorized collection and vandalism of high-integrity sites. As discussed above, application of Cumulative Cultural Mitigation-1

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and subsequent environmental review of the impacts to cultural resources of these future projects and identification of appropriate mitigation measures would reduce the effects of amending the Egan RMP.

#### **5.4.17 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

Similar to the Falcon to Gonder project, the amendments to the Shoshone-Eureka, Elko, and Egan RMPs would have little or no effect to minority or low-income populations, as the utility corridor would be located in sparsely populated areas with few, if any, concentrations of minority or low-income groups. None of the corridor alignments would pass through or close to the eight identified Native American reservations in the area. The nearest reservation is the Ely Reservation, which is located approximately 10 miles from the Gonder substation. The Egan RMP already identifies a designated corridor in this area. Approvals of additional rights-of-way in the corridor could benefit low-income and minority populations through increased spending in the region and temporarily increased levels of employment.

Elimination of the Highway 305 planning corridor would similarly have little or no effect on minority or low income populations as the vicinity of the 305 corridor is sparsely populated. No Native American reservations are located in the Highway 305 corridor.

#### **5.4.18 NATIVE AMERICAN CONCERNS**

##### **SHOSHONE-EUREKA RMP**

A new utility corridor in the Shoshone-Eureka resource area may potentially impact various ethnobiotic resources, including pinyon pine, sage grouse, eagles, rabbits, and medicinal plants. Native Americans have expressed concerns about the potential effects of transmission lines on these non-heritage resources.

Impacts to Native American concerns resulting from the proposed RMP amendment would be similar to those created by the Falcon to Gonder project, and as such, mitigation measures contained in Section 3.4 (mitigation related to vegetation), Section 3.7 (mitigation related to special-status species), and Section 3.19 (mitigation related to medicinal plants) could also be useful for future projects in the corridor to eliminate or reduce impacts to ethnobiotic resources.

While the extent of ethnobiotic resources within the Highway 305 corridor is unknown, it can be assumed that some or all types may exist here given the similarity of the landscape. Elimination of the Highway 305 corridor would also eliminate potential impacts to Native American concerns regarding ethnobiotic resources in this area.

##### **ELKO RMP**

Impacts to Native American concerns resulting from a proposed Elko RMP amendment would be similar to those created by the Falcon to Gonder project. As a result, similar mitigation measures would be useful for future projects in the corridor.

##### **EGAN RMP**

Impacts to Native American concerns resulting from a proposed Egan RMP amendment would be similar to those created by the Falcon to Gonder project. As a result, similar mitigation measures would be useful for future projects in the corridor.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

Amendments to the Shoshone-Eureka, Elko, and Egan RMPs could facilitate the location of additional rights-of-way and facilities within a new utility corridor, creating roughly the same types of adverse impacts as the Falcon to Gonder project. Mitigation measures similar to the ones identified in this EIS could be required of future projects to reduce or eliminate impacts associated with the RMP amendments. In addition, subsequent environmental review of future rights-of-way projects would identify potential effects to resources.

Elimination of the Highway 305 planning corridor from the Shoshone-Eureka RMP would have a beneficial effect by discouraging the proliferation of utility corridors in that area and encouraging new projects to be constructed in corridors that are consistent across the three BLM districts. The Highway 305 corridor is longer than the Falcon to Gonder corridor and could potentially impact a greater number of sensitive resources than the Falcon to Gonder corridor alignment. Elimination of this corridor is generally seen as a benefit.



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